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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: FINAL, EDITED TRC REPORT RELEASED AFTER MUCH
DELAY

REF: A) MONROVIA 465 B) MONROVIA 487 C) MONROVIA 549 D) MONROVIA 602
E) MONROVIA 691 F) MONROVIA 906

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. After many delays, the final, edited version of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report was released on December 8. It contained few changes, mostly the addition of 17 names to lists of perpetrators and more statistical analysis. Implementing the recommendations is still a topic of debate in Monrovia, and the Independent National Human Rights Commissioners, which by law is charged to oversee the implementation of the report recommendations, will not be appointed to succeed the TRC until after the Legislature returns in January. Unlike in July, President Sirleaf reacted immediately, publicly praising the Commissioners for their work and vowing for the reconciliation process to continue. She has also been consulting with Nairobi-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue representative David Lambo regarding supporting a National Reconciliation Conference. USG funding will be used to transport TRC documents to Georgia Tech. END SUMMARY.

FINAL REPORT RELEASED LATE, WITH LITTLE FANFARE

¶2. (U) After much delay, the final, edited version of Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report was released at a December 8 press conference and printed copies of the updated version are being distributed. The report was also uploaded on the TRC website at: <https://www.trcofliberia.org/>

¶3. (SBU) The release of the final report follows repeated delays that pushed back its official publication and announcement from an October window to November due to ongoing problems with the printing service in Ghana and transportation of the 1,500 printed copies from Accra to Monrovia. UNMIL assisted with transport from Accra, airlifting 1,250 copies of the final report from Ghana on November 129.

¶4. (U) The content of the final document remained largely unchanged, with a few additions. Ten names were added to the most notorious perpetrators list, five names were added to the economic crimes section, and two names to the sanction from public office section. The names and nationalities of 102 foreign fighters were also added, along with statistics on victims, perpetrators, categories, violations by warring factions, and gender of victims and perpetrators. As well, 702 names of lesser category of perpetrators and people who expressed remorse during the hearing phase were recommended for "palava hut" methods of reconciliation. Volumes I, II and III were printed, but Volume IV, comprising 10,000 pages of testimony, was not printed, due to lack of funding. One appendix of Volume III contains the descriptive statistics from testimony compiled by Benetech, which was funded by DRL.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES PERSIST

¶5. (SBU) Under the TRC Act, the TRC will now disband to be succeeded by the Independent National Human Rights Commission (Ref D), but the Senate has not yet approved the INHRC commissioners, and one nominee's name was withdrawn from consideration after he was

implicated in human trafficking. Furthermore, several issues related to TRC records storage and finances remain unresolved. TRC staff members' salaries have not been paid in nearly six months due to the removal of funding for TRC administrative issues from the most recent budget.

¶16. (SBU) The USG is working with the TRC and Georgia Tech on a plan for the final disposition of the TRC's paper archives. Using USAID funding, the documents will be shipped to Georgia Tech, which will pick up the cost of electronically copying and archiving the documents. There is no set plan for the return of the paper documents.

REPORT RELEASED WITH LITTLE FANFARE

¶17. (SBU) The release came with less fanfare than the release of the unedited version in July, but the report continues to be carried in the press, and Commissioners claim to be receiving renewed threats against them. All TRC commissioners are maintaining a low profile and some are considering leaving Liberia for one or more years. Former warlord and Senator Prince Johnson, named prominently in the report, issued a statement on December 8 stating that "the TRC final report is fit only for the dustbin." He also accused Chairman Verdier of being an ex-combatant and pledged to show documents to that effect.

¶18. (U) However, President Sirleaf immediately released a statement through her spokesperson praising the work of the commissioners, calling on legislators to discuss the report with their constituents, and saying that "a process is underway to formulate the right strategy for implementing the report, taking into account

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that national reconciliation, peace and harmony are the cornerstone of any vibrant society," without providing specifics. This is in contrast to July, when the president waited at least two weeks before commenting on the release of the unedited report.

NEXT STEPS REMAIN UNCLEAR

¶19. (SBU) TRC Chairman Verdier expressed his hope to Poloff that the recommendations contained in the final report will be fully implemented. The act establishing the TRC requires the Independent National Human Rights Commission to ensure implementation of the report's recommendations and the president is required to submit regular reports to the National Legislature on implementation of the recommendations. This implies that the president has some responsibility for carrying out the TRC's recommended actions -- including those involving her.

¶110. (SBU) At the same time, the search for a path paralleling the politicized-TRC process is already underway in Liberia. David Lambo of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) told Ambassador that President Sirleaf has sought his organization's assistance in putting together a conference of civil society organizations to formulate a strategy for national dialogue. CHD plans to host a small brainstorming session in Nairobi in January 2010 with key stakeholders from civil society to strategize on the way forward. Secretary General Benjamin Lartey, speaking for the Liberia Council of Churches, told Ambassador on December 7 that their split with the TRC came early in the process, and that they favor healing and reconciliation over prosecutions (Ref F).

¶111. (SBU) COMMENT: There remains a distinct possibility that the GOL may decide to shelve the report and explore other means for continuing the country's reconciliation process. Many Liberians question the TRC's motives for including the president among the sanctioned, while so many others who committed violent acts were omitted. Indeed, the decision to include the president for still undocumented reasons has made President Sirleaf's task more difficult, and at this point she seems to be the only person with sufficient influence to direct the process. Her positive comments on the TRC report suggest that she still wants to find a way forward. Also key in the process is the Legislature, of which

several members are named in the report.

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